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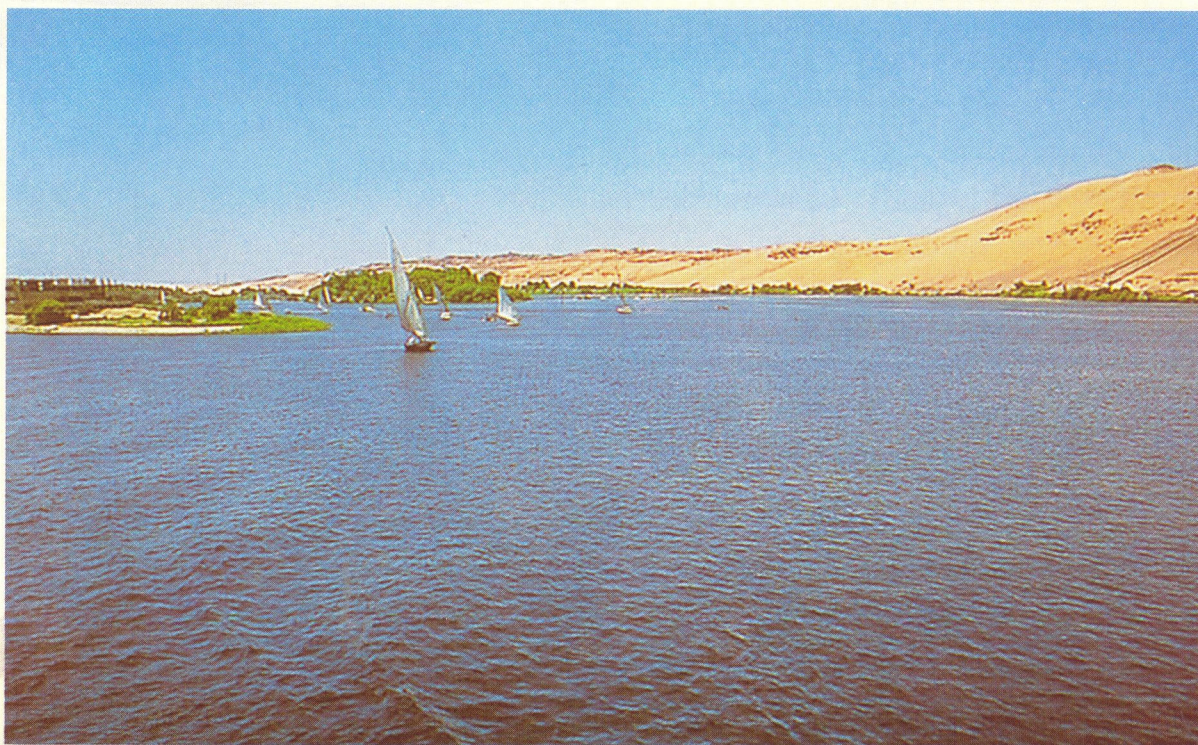
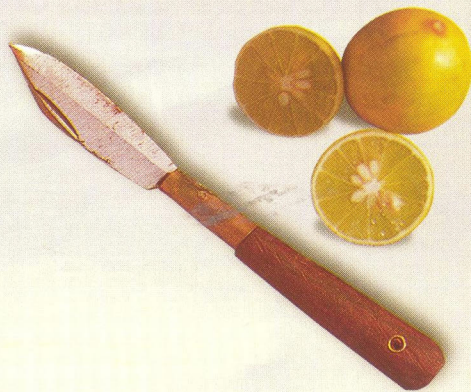
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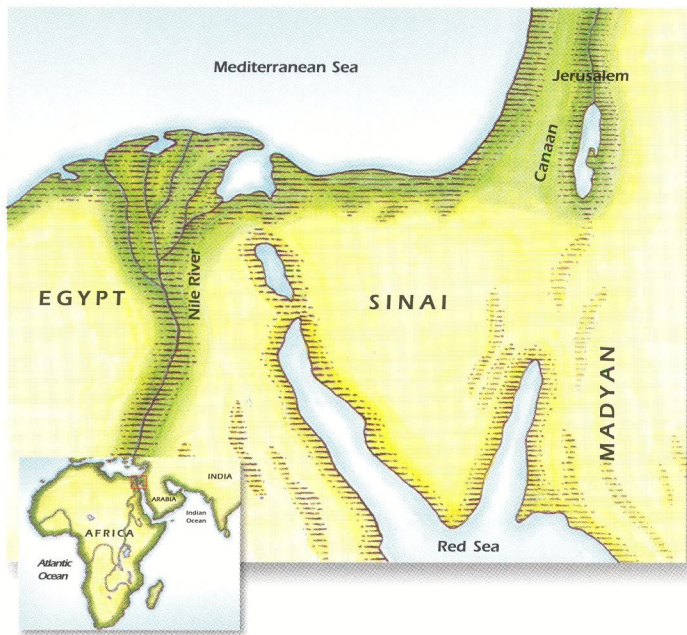
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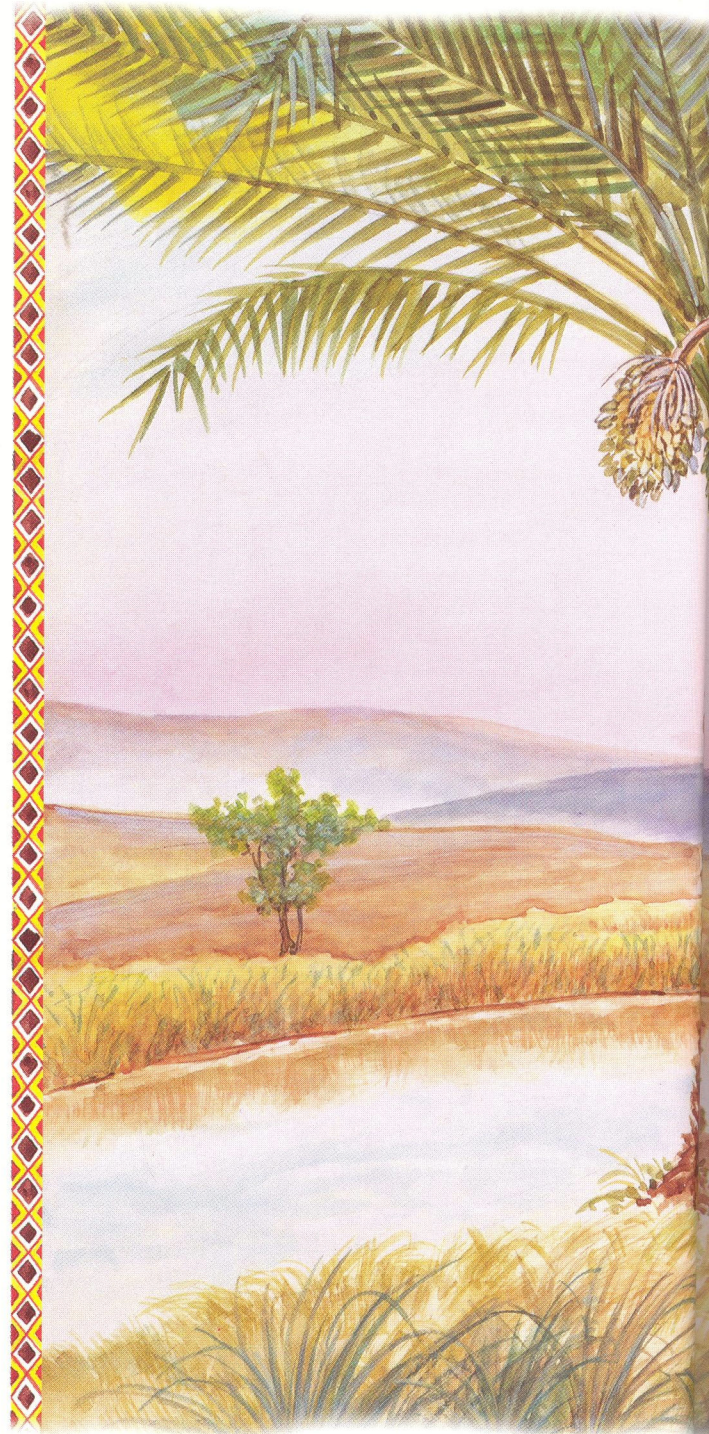
1. A Special Child



Long, long ago in a far-away place in Canaan, near Nablus, some thirty miles north of Jerusalem, lived a pious old man. His name was Yaqub عليه السلام. He and his family and other relatives lived in tents woven from goat hair, and sent their animals to graze in the nearby hills and valleys. These were very fertile places, dotted here and there with little groves of trees. The pasture was so rich that they could stay for a long time in one place and did not have to move every week or so as some tribes did.

The Prophet Yaqub's family members usually spent their time looking after their herds of animals, milking their goats and sheep and making household things. Everything they did was to help and support their large family. Sometimes they would go out into the hills and hunt. Every so often they would load their pack animals with animal skins and meat and whatever cloth they had woven and take these goods to distant places to sell.

Yaqub عليه السلام was the grandson of the great prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام. He was himself a prophet, and also the leader of the whole tribe. He had twelve sons. Yusuf عليه السلام was Yaqub's eleventh son and the first child of the Prophet Yaqub's wife, Rahil, who had been childless for many years. Rahil had one more son, Binyamin, Yusuf's little brother.



Yusuf's ten older half-brothers had another mother. As a child Yusuf ﷺ spent his time in and around the family, playing with his little brother Binyamin, running with the baby lambs and gazing out over the vast desert lands.

He had a keen intelligence and a kind nature. His father loved him dearly. He kept

Yusuf ﷺ close to him, and had long talks with him even when Yusuf ﷺ was still quite young. From the very beginning Yaqub ﷺ was much impressed by this noble and gentle soul, for whom he saw a great and promising future.

'The Most Beautiful Story...'

The Qur'an devotes almost the entire twelfth *surah*, or chapter, to the story of the Prophet Yusuf ﷺ. It is a story that shows us the power of love and compassion and the ability of man, with God's help, to find the right path in spite of all the difficulties and pain that may block the way.

Allah revealed this story to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ at a time when his enemies, who wanted to stamp out God's message, had escalated their cruelty to the point of plotting his murder. It was during the last days of the Prophet Muhammad's stay in Makkah after the death of his wife Khadijah, a time in his life known as the Year of Sorrow. Muhammad was dispirited, and his companions and followers were in need of encouragement. At this difficult moment some of the Prophet Muhammad's opponents challenged him to prove that he was really a prophet by answering questions about one of the prophets of the Children of Israel whose story was not known among the Arabs—Yusuf ﷺ. The Prophet Muhammad's enemies hoped to catch him making secret inquiries of the Jews about Yusuf ﷺ, and then they would shout out loud that he was a fraud. As it turned out, they were disappointed.

The story of Yusuf ﷺ given to the Prophet Muhammad at this critical time was a lesson and a source of inspiration for Muhammad and his followers. As the Qur'an says: "Surely in Yusuf ﷺ and his brothers there are signs for asking men." The story of Yusuf ﷺ and his brothers is very similar to the Prophet Muhammad's trials and ultimate triumph. The prophet's opponents in Makkah acted toward him just as Yusuf's brothers had toward Yusuf ﷺ, and, like Yusuf ﷺ, Muhammad ﷺ eventually attained a higher social stature than any of his opponents could imagine and succeeded in his God-given mission to establish the message of Islam.



2. The Sun, the Moon and Eleven Stars

One day Yusuf عليه السلام had an unusual dream. In the dream eleven stars and the sun and the moon all bowed down to him. When he woke up, he hurried to tell his father about this strange dream. Yaqub عليه السلام understood right away that great things lay in store for his young and best-loved son. This had been made plain in the dream. Sensing that his half brothers might become jealous of him and try to harm him, Yaqub عليه السلام warned Yusuf عليه السلام not to tell them about it: "My little son, do not tell your brothers about your dream lest they hatch a plot against you, for Satan is the open enemy of man."

Yaqub عليه السلام cautioned his son, "The Lord has chosen you, Yusuf عليه السلام, for a higher purpose. He will teach you to interpret dreams, and will perfect His blessings upon you." He told Yusuf عليه السلام that Allah would bless him and their family in just the way He had blessed

his grandfather Ishaq عليه السلام and his great grandfather Ibrahim عليه السلام.

The ten half-brothers were aware of their father's great love for Yusuf عليه السلام. They would go off to look after the family's flocks, grumbling and muttering, and saying:

